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COMMITTEE ON NEW AND RENEWABLE SOURCES OF
ENERGY AND ON ENERGY FOR DEVELOPMENT
Second session
12-22 February 1996
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE FIRST AND SPECIAL SESSIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The recommendations and suggestions of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development on its first session were considered by the Economic and Social Council, which approved the request by the Committee to hold a special session on rural energy, approved the provisional agenda for the special and second sessions of the Committee, took note of the report of the Committee and invited members to submit their views on the format in which the Committee should present its work.

The report on the special session of the Committee was considered first by the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group on Sectoral Issues of the Commission on Sustainable Development, by the Commission itself, and by the Economic and Social Council. The Commission encouraged Governments to integrate action on energy into their efforts for sustainable agriculture and rural development and furthermore urged them to support and facilitate efforts of interested developing countries in their transition towards the sustainable use of an appropriate mix of fossil and renewable sources of energy. The Economic and Social Council took note of the report on the special session.

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INTRODUCTION

1. At its special session, the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development requested a report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the first and special sessions of the Committee. 1/ The present report has been prepared in response to the Committee's request.

I. FIRST SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE

A. Background

2. At its first session held from 7 to 18 February 1994, the Committee adopted a comprehensive draft resolution on energy for sustainable development that alluded to the important linkages existing between energy and the objectives expressed in a number of international instruments 2/ in four domains, namely, development and socio-economic growth, environment, stability of market conditions conducive to economic growth and natural resources. The Committee observed that options for developing a new energy path existed through (a) more efficient use of energy and energy intensive materials; (b) increased use of new and renewable sources of energy; (c) more efficient production and use of fossil fuels; and (d) fuel substitution, from high-carbon- to low-carbon- or no-carbon-based fuels. 3/ When the options were used in an environmentally sound and safe, economically viable and socially acceptable manner, they provided a large potential for change. The Committee furthermore invited Member States, the international community including intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as the private sector to take specific actions with respect to specific options.

3. The Committee requested the Economic and Social Council to approve a special session of the Committee in February/March 1995 (draft decision I) 4/ in order to provide advice on energy for rural development to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its third session (scheduled to be held from 11 to 28 April 1995), during the latter's consideration of chapter 14 of Agenda 21 (Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development), specifically programme K (Rural energy transition to enhance productivity). The Committee would consider the following items for the special session: (a) energy for rural development; (b) biomass for energy and (c) energy coordination. The Committee, furthermore, prepared a provisional agenda and list of documentation for its second session (draft decision II) 4/ for consideration and approval by the Council.

B. Consideration of the report of the Committee on its first session

4. At its substantive session of 1994, the Economic and Social Council had before it the report of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development. The Council, however, decided to postpone consideration of the report to a resumed substantive session of 1994 (Council

decision 1994/294), in order to allow for further consultations among Member States.

5. During its resumed session, held on 3 and 4 November 1994, the Council considered the report of the Committee and:

(a) Approved the request by the Committee to hold a special session to discuss the above-mentioned subjects in relation to sustainable agriculture and sustainable development (Council decision 1994/309);

(b) Approved the provisional agenda for the second session of the Committee (Council decision 1994/310);

(c) Reaffirmed the importance of the continuing work conducted by the Committee in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/235, 5/ and took note with appreciation of the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee (E/1994/25 and Corr.1) and invited Member States to consider, as appropriate, those recommendations (Council decision 1994/311);

(d) Invited Member States to submit as soon as possible their views on the format in which the Committee should present its work (Council decision 1994/311).

II. SPECIAL SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE

A. Background

6. Following the decision by the Economic and Social Council (decision 1994/309), the Committee held a special session from 6 to 17 February 1995.

7. The Committee made a number of recommendations to Member States, entities within the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations to consider, as appropriate, the following actions on a priority basis: 6/

(a) Not later than the year 2000, States that do not have national plans of action on energy for sustainable agriculture and rural development should review the energy situation in their rural areas and formulate as well as launch the implementation of such plans, following the suggestions of the Committee contained in the present report;

(b) In such national plans of action, special attention should be given to the sustainable development and efficient use of biomass as a source of energy. This implies, inter alia, promotion of the sustainable production of biomass for fuel and electricity and promotion of energy efficiency at both household and agro-industrial levels;

(c) Before the year 2000, a global initiative should be launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and other interested organizations with the support of donor countries in order to facilitate the efforts of the developing

countries to develop and implement a massive effort to bring electrical power to the people in rural and isolated areas, based on successes already achieved in renewable energy technologies, such as photovoltaic, wind and mini-hydro;

(d) Before the year 2000, a global initiative should be launched by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNDP, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and other interested organizations, with the support of donor countries, to set up a combined programme to achieve detailed mapping of the potential of renewable energy sources, focusing on solar, wind and hydropower, as well as land resources for biomass energy, in order to facilitate the efforts of developing countries in those areas;

(e) To promote capacity-building, and with the help of donor countries, there should be established, on the initiative of the United Nations, a network of centres of excellence for environmentally sound energy technologies with a focus on energy and material efficiency improvement and on the development and demonstration of renewable energy sources. In order to accomplish this, existing national centres may be enhanced or, where needed, new centres of excellence created with the aim of achieving a regional role for each of them;

(f) To significantly advance energy for sustainable development and to stimulate coordination in energy, the United Nations should study in-depth ways and means of strengthening institutional arrangements within the United Nations system, including the possible establishment of a dedicated institution.

B. Consideration of the report of the Committee on its special session

1. Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Working Group on Sectoral Issues of the Commission on Sustainable Development

8. A Vice-Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the Committee to the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group on Sectoral Issues of the Commission on Sustainable Development (27 February-3 March 1995) for consideration. The Working Group took note of the report of the Committee on its special session and stressed that energy was one of the prerequisites of sustainable agriculture and rural development. It furthermore recommended that the Commission should give careful consideration to the recommendations for priority action by Member States, entities within the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. 7/

9. The Working Group put forward to the Commission on Sustainable Development for its consideration and coordination, as a key proposal for action, efforts to encourage Governments to integrate action on energy into efforts for sustainable agriculture and rural development, paying particular attention to the use of biomass, the mapping of potential rural energy resources, and the extension of electrification based on renewable energy technologies in rural areas. Such action should be facilitated by support from relevant organizations and donor agencies and could include the networking of centres of excellence, which might also serve as training centres. The Commission might consider how institutional

arrangements to support sustainable energy development might be facilitated within the United Nations system.

2. Commission on Sustainable Development

10. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its third session (11-28 April 1995), considered the report of the Committee on its special session, as well as the report of the Inter-sessional Working Group and:

(a) Encouraged Governments to integrate action on energy into their efforts for sustainable agriculture and rural development, paying particular attention to the use of energy for electrification, heating and other purposes, by means of renewable and other forms of energy;

(b) Urged Governments to support and facilitate efforts of interested developing countries in their transition towards the sustainable use of an appropriate mix of fossil and renewable sources of energy for rural communities, taking note of the recommendations made by the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development at its special session. 8/

3. Economic and Social Council

11. The Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 1995, considered the report of the Committee on its special session. The report was introduced by the Director of the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, who made a statement updating the follow-up to Council decision 1994/311. The Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development had, on 20 April 1995, sent a letter to all permanent representatives to the United Nations requesting the views of their respective Governments on the format in which the Committee should present its work.

12. To the present date, a total of only six countries had responded. Even so, only one of the replies contained specific views on the format of the report. The Council took note of the report of the Committee on its special session and approved the provisional agenda for the second session of the Committee (Council decision 1995/240).

III. RELATED ACTIVITIES

13. An International Seminar on Decentralized Rural Electrification for Rural Areas took place in Marrakesh, Morocco, from 13 to 17 November 1995. It was convened jointly by the Governments of France and Morocco, with the support of UNDP, the World Bank, the European Commission and member countries of the European Union, and attended by 300 experts from all over the world. The seminar adopted recommendations to the Commission on Sustainable Development and to the actors of the development programmes on changing the scale and pace of the decentralized electrification process in rural areas. The recommendations were categorized into general recommendations on organizations and capacity-

building and recommendations on financing. They would be presented to the Committee as a background document, for consideration. The Committee would forward the document to the Commission for further consideration and action, as appropriate.

IV. CONCLUSION

14. The Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development was established in 1992 as part of the restructuring and reorganization of the Economic and Social Council 5/. It is a committee of experts, in contrast to its predecessors, in particular, the former Committee on the Development and Utilization of New and Renewable Sources of Energy, which was a General Assembly committee of the whole. Consequently, the format in which the Committee should present its work to the Council has been the subject of protracted discussion - but as yet no final resolution has been found. As part of the consideration of this matter, the Council requested Member States to submit their views on the format, but so far the response has been minimal.

15. The technical and substantive character of the report of the Committee is intended to elicit in-depth discussion by the Council; however, this has, so far, not been forthcoming. Meanwhile, the report of the Committee on its special session was considered by the Commission on Sustainable Development, which in turn makes specific recommendations for action by the international community; but this point must be viewed against the background that reports of the Committee are not normally considered by the Commission, except in special cases such as that concerning energy for rural development, discussed in connection with chapter 14 of Agenda 21.

16. The Marrakesh seminar is a welcome initiative. It is hoped that the Committee will consider in depth the recommendations of the seminar and, in turn, make specific recommendations for action by the Commission on Sustainable Development and by the Economic and Social Council.

Notes

1/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 25 (E/1995/25/Rev.1), chap. I.

2/ For example, the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade, Agenda 21, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the 1979 Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution.

3/ See Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1994, Supplement No. 25 and corrigendum (E/1994/25 and Corr.1), chap. I, sect. A, draft resolution.

4/ Ibid, chap. I, sect. B.

5/ General Assembly resolution 46/235 of 13 April 1992 on restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields.

6/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 25 (E/1995/25/Rev.1), chap. II.

7/ Report of the Ad Hoc Inter-sessional Working Group on Sectoral Issues of the Commission on Sustainable Development (E/CN.17/1995/10).

8/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 12 (E/1995/32), paras. 216 and 217.